

THE MINISTER AND
RATIONAL EMOTIVE PSYCHOTHERAPY
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In 1960, the results were published of an unprecedented study of a "normal" adult population of one country. University of Michigan investigators conducted extensive interviews with hundreds of Americans representing a cross section of the noninstitutionalized population. Their findings, reported in "Americans View Their Mental Health" gives a clear picture of the feelings and attitudes, problems and fears of adult Americans. Fewer than five out of ten Americans considered their marriages happy. Over half of those who did consider themselves to be very happily married felt inadequate as wives and husbands. Almost twenty five percent of Americans admitted that they had felt themselves on the verge of a nervous breakdown at some point in their adult lives. The death of a loved one and job pressures were the greatest factors contributing to this feeling. One person out of four admitted that he worries a lot or all the time. Nearly one person out of every four indicated that he had had a problem in which professional help would have been useful. One out of seven

of all those interviewed had actually sought such professional help. Where had these persons gone for help? Forty-two percent had gone to clergymen and twenty-nine percent to nonpsychiatric physicians. Only thirty-one percent had gone to a Psychiatrist, psychologist, or marriage counselor. In light of these findings there is no doubt that Ministers occupy a central and strategic role as counselors in our society.

For the purposes of this paper, the term Minister will be used to mean essentially any religious leader: Priest, Minister or Rabbi. Although a sample study of this type cannot be interpreted to lay the broad premise that the Minister is overwhelmingly a counselor, or that he is capable or qualified; it simply means that the public has thrust him into a role which he must assume and hopefully attempt to do the very best that he possibly can.

The purpose of this paper is to first of all portray the Minister as a counselor and secondly to attempt to show that the Minister can effectively use the Theory of Emotive Rational Psychotherapy, both as a means of counseling and for his own personal growth as counselor and person.

The Minister's ability to be an effective counselor depends upon many things. It would be unwise for any person to attempt to enunciate the myriad of complexities which go into the making of the average Minister, if there is such an animal. However, the writer will attempt to cite just a few areas of shortcomings and strongpoints of the so called average Minister. First of all, the average Minister receives a theological education which is geared to an over abundance of religious theory, history, dogmatics, Church polity, administration and language. If he is lucky and attends one of the more progressive theological divinity schools, he might have one or two courses which touch the basics of what is called Clinical

Pastoral Education. In other words, when he receives his theological degree, he will be qualified in Hebrew and Greek, Church history, administration polity, and many other facets of his particular brand of religion; but he most certainly will not be qualified as a counselor. Also, depending upon his own tradition in his religious denomination and his personal religious experience, his entire approach to counseling will emerge. The members of his Church, the members of his community, and the general public will come to rely upon the Minister with a deep trust that he is capable of leading them through crisis experiences; when in actuality, he is ill prepared to do it. Of course, it is understood that much of counseling is dependent upon what all parties perceive counseling to be; however, no one will know that the Minister is ill prepared to counsel more than the Minister himself. However, with experience, possible more schooling, personal reading, the Minister begins to reach a level of counseling ability. Depending upon how he reached this level, his approach to counseling will emerge. Probably, if we are honest, the vast majority of counseling theory and practice in the last several years, at least, has more or less followed the Rogerian approach. Although there are those who would disagree with this fact, the possibility of their being in an academic setting in the last ten years is very slim. Simply stated, of course, through the Rogerian approach the Minister is taught, as are all counseling students, that the troubled individual is to find his own solution to his difficulties. This is done by asking the person to talk about himself, his problems, how he arrived at this particular point, and what progress he hopes to make. The counselor is encouraged to become accepting, attentive, and gain rapport with the counselee. He is exhorted to become evaluative, interpretive, supportive, probing, and understanding. All of this takes place in eight or ten sess-

ions. Ideally, at the end of these eight or ten sessions, the counselee gains insight into his situation and through his own resources changes or modified his behavior.

However, this just isn't the way it works. Granted, there are times when this does work, and under ideal conditions and circumstances, it usually does help. However, ideal circumstances and conditions are rare; and the Minister very seldom sees people under ideal conditions. As a rule, they are involved in various and assorted crisis experiences, or much more common parishners who need counseling and fail to realize it. Also, much of the counseling that Ministers do is short term counseling. Occasionally the Minister will see a counselee in a formal counseling situation seven or eight times, but usually it will be two or three times at best.

It is in this setting and under this criterion that the Minister must be as effective as possible. His approach must be geared to offering the maximum amount of help to the counselee at this precise time. His second opportunity might not come.

It is at this time that the Minister can use to its full effectiveness, Rational Emotive Psychotherapy as developed by Albert Ellis.

Dr. Albert Ellis is a Clinical Psychologist who has been a practicing therapist for over two decades. He is the Director of the Institute for Rational Living. He has published over two hundred papers for various journals and publications; edited or authored over twenty-five books.

This paper does not deal in any way with Dr. Ellis's personal beliefs or feelings about religion. Its primary purpose is to show that it is possible for the Minister to learn the Theory of Rational Emotive Psychotherapy and to practice it.

Rational Emotive Psychotherapy as defined by Albert Ellis is based on the belief that man can live less anxiously and in a less self-defeating

manner by changing his irrational beliefs or philosophies. Rational Emotive Psychotherapy helps the individual to become aware of, and vigorously challenge the self defeating ideas that he has internalized and is at present, reindoctrinating himself with. As an integral part of this process, Rational Emotive Psychotherapy focuses directly on positive behavior change.

Ellis further lists eleven irrational ideas which cause disturbances:

1. The idea that it is a dire necessity for an adult human being to be loved or approved by virtually every significant other person in his community.
2. The idea that one should be thoroughly competent, adequate, and achieving in all possible respects if one is to consider oneself worthwhile.
3. The idea that certain people are bad, wicked, or villainous and that they should be severely blamed and punished for their villainy.
4. The idea that it is awful and catastrophic when things are not the way one would very much like them to be.
5. The idea that human unhappiness is externally caused and that people have little or no ability to control their sorrows and disturbances.
6. The idea that if something is or may be dangerous or fearsome one should be terribly concerned about it and should keep dwelling on the possibility of its occurring.
7. The idea that it is easier to avoid than to face certain life difficulties and self-responsibilities.
8. The idea that one should be dependent on others and need someone stronger than oneself on whom to rely.
9. The idea that one's past history is an all-important determiner of one's present behavior and that because something once strongly affected one's life, it should indefinitely have a similar effect.
10. The idea that one should become quite upset over other people's problems and disturbances.
11. The idea that there is invariably a right, precise, and perfect solution to human problems and that it is catastrophic if this perfect ~~perfect~~ solution is not found.

The Minister and His Practice of Rational Emotive Psychotherapy

In order for the Minister to effectively practice Rational Emotive Psychotherapy, there are several areas in which he must have a fair degree of knowledge. First of all, he must be somewhat conversant with what takes place

in the counseling process, ~~or~~ at least minimally. By this is meant that he should be able to ^{ass}ess the nature of the counsellee and the problem, again at least minimally. This writer feels that this must be done in order for RET to be put into effect. Secondly, the Minister must have a thorough knowledge of RET. Due to the lack of available reading material on the subject of RET, the writer of this paper has been fortunate to have borrowed a tape on the theory of RET by Albert Ellis. The writer estimated that he has listened to the tape approximately fifty times.

To the writer of this paper, the advantages of listening to the tape have been overwhelming. One discovers the rationale of how Ellis arrived at where he did in counseling and why he has seen the necessity to change his approach. Ellis states that he was schooled as a psychotherapist in much the same way as all psychotherapists are: Freud, Jung, Harway. However, he came to realize that this approach was not the answer for him. There was a quicker way, a more effective way, and a more desirable way. He realized that insight was not the answer; that just because a person was able to see his difficulties and realize that they were somehow connected to the past did not necessarily make him well or achieve the desired result. Ellis says just the same as he could not perceive a physicist, chemist, or biologist teaching in a nondirect way he cannot conceive of a psychotherapist teaching in a nondirect way. Ellis states that he is a teacher; that what he must do is reeducate his clients in the proper way their behavior should be. He states the problem with most people is not what they perceive that causes difficulty to be but what they tell themselves about that difficulty. Therefore, says Ellis, it is reeducation teaching people to think about second thoughts instead of uncritically accepting them.

Ellis says that he goes in very directly and teaches people that work and practice is the only way a person changes, insight will not do it, only work.

Ellis says that for a person to effectively practice RET, there are several things that he must do.

First, the therapist must listen carefully and find out as quickly as possible what the basic philosophies of the person really are. Secondly, he must show the patient that he has this philosophy and that it is related to his symptoms. Thirdly, indicate to the patient what his real goals or outlooks are. The patient ~~thinks~~ thinks that he wants to do a certain thing when in actuality he wants to do something else such as in the complete approval of all other humans. It is this real drive which drives him into his neurotic behavior. Fourthly, show the patient why his basic premises are irrational and ~~how he makes~~ makes illogical deductions from them. For instance, if he demands the love and approval of everybody, this is irrational. Fifthly, the patient must be shown that as long as he retains these premises, he must defeat himself and there is virtually nothing else that he can do. Sixthly, the patient must be shown how to find his own basic philosophies underlying his frustrations and upset them. The therapists, of course, will not always be around. Seventh and most important is that the patient must be shown how he can challenge questions, and uproot unsound philosophies of life. He has to be taught some of the principles of logic and elements of scientific methods. The patient must be taught how to set up hypothesis and how to ask for evidence to support that hypothesis. After this is accomplished, says Ellis, the patient can achieve some result of being a happy person. He can be taught that he is alive and just because he is alive, he deserves to be a happy, well adjusted person.

Assuming that the Minister is knowledgeable and has obtained some degree of proficiency in RET, he could apply these basic principles relatively well. Much of it, he has already done and yet less effectively because he has not had available the basic empirical knowledge nor has he known the technique

although use of the principles have been present. The Minister by avocation is a teacher. He must teach; although there is the religious element involved, the larger teaching has to do with the day to day living of interpersonal relations and interaction with other human beings.

Many people have a mistaken concept of the role of the Minister in counseling. There are those who see him as strictly religious, and all orientation is completely turned to a religious tone. However, about ninety-five per cent of the counseling done by the Minister has absolutely no relation to formal or organized religious activity. However, dependent upon the Minister's own interpretation of his religious experience, the counseling does possess a degree of religious morality which ultimately affects the counselor and his counseling. This writer feels that all problems either directly or indirectly are in some degree spiritual problems. Realizing that such a statement deserves a lengthy explanation, it will have to suffice to say that this writer's concept of religious orientation is highly unstructured and extremely tolerant as to others orientation. Whether or not an individual's personal belief is in God, a supreme being, higher philosophy, or in himself, as long as it is turned inward, it is spiritual. The Minister seeks to minister to the whole person in helping him realize that, as Ellis says, he is alive and because he is alive, he deserves to be a happy person.

Probably one of the most advantageous aspects of RET to the Minister is its personal applicability to himself. Probably no other profession practices as much self defeatism as does the Ministry. Regardless of the psychological overtones, A.e. Messiah Complex, sacrifice of himself to save the world, unresolved childhood experiences, or other insights; RET for the Minister is a therapeutic tool which he cannot afford to deny. Through its personal practice he can realize that much of his behavior is unrealistic and irrational; that

cannot labor under the Pauline Apostolic concept of being all things to all men. The Minister can personally apply the basic tenets of RET in his interpersonal relations daily. He can adequately apply it in family relations, relations with other Ministers with whom he is usually competitive, and a thousand and one daily interactions with other human beings. Probably no professional man is more keenly sensitive than the Minister, and yet RET can enable him to control his sensitivities by adhering to the principles of rationality. Also, usually because of the Minister's ability to be strong willed, he can apply the RET principle of work to its more effective degree. Additionally, due to the fact that the Minister's services are free and he is easily approachable, he will see many troubled individuals with a myriad of complexing problems. It will become absolutely necessary that he develop a way to continually cleanse himself. A thorough practice of RET will enable him to do this. This doesn't mean that he will be less involved. It means that he will see the greater good of the person that he is trying to assist. His personal ego involvement will not supplant the helping relationship which he is trying to facilitate. His supreme counseling goal will become other directed where it must be if the Minister is to be an effective counselor.